

Sexual Health

at the Wolverton 020 8974 9331

Kingston upon Thames, Surrey (South West London)

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Herpes

Herpes in heterosexual men

What is Herpes?

- Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection caused by the Herpes simplex viruses – either type 1 (HSV-1) or type 2 (HSV-2)
- This is the same family of viruses that causes cold sores on the lip.
- The majority of men infected with herpes will have no symptoms or only very mild disease. Often the infection goes completely unrecognised.
- Men with symptoms may typically notice one or more blisters on the foreskin or shaft of the penis. These quickly break open leaving tender ulcers (sores) that take 1-2 weeks to heal.
- Herpes outbreaks may recur but they are always much milder and shorter than the first.
- The number of outbreaks usually decreases over a period of years.
- Herpes increases the risk of catching HIV or passing it on to your partner.
- If you have herpes we recommend that you should have a full STI screen including a HIV test.

How common is herpes?

- Genital herpes infection is very common (an estimated 1 in 20 men in the UK have herpes)
- It is less common in men than women, possibly because female to male transmission is less effective than male to female.
- Most men will be unaware of their infection.

How do you catch herpes?

- From sexual contact with someone else that has herpes – but this person may not know they have herpes and may have never noticed anything wrong with themselves.
- Herpes simplex type 2 is usually caught through vaginal or anal sex or sometimes just close genital contact.
- Herpes simplex type 1 may be caught through oral sex with a female partner that has cold sores.

What would I notice if I had herpes?

Most men with genital herpes would not notice anything wrong.

First episode herpes

In some men the first episode of herpes can be quite pronounced.

- A man usually notices something within 2 weeks of catching the virus from his partner.
- Symptoms may include:
 - tingling, pain, blisters and then sores at the site of infection
 - swelling and redness at the site of infection – usually the foreskin, head of the penis or shaft of the penis.
 - pain on passing urine
 - flu like symptoms
 - swollen glands in the groin
- The sores usually take 2 weeks to heal.

Recurrent episodes

- Men diagnosed with a first episode of herpes may expect to get a couple of recurrences over the next year or so.

- Recurrences:
 - are much milder – usually only one or two blisters
 - last a shorter time – usually less than a week
 - occur less frequently with the passage of time

How do I get tested for herpes?

- Herpes can often be diagnosed on clinical examination by an experienced clinician but can only be reliably diagnosed by taking a viral culture or PCR swab from a blister or sore – it is best to attend a sexual health clinic as soon as possible after noticing anything wrong.
- Tests will be unable to detect the virus once the sores have crusted or already healed.
- The result will be available in 7 to 10 days

How is herpes treated?

- **First episode** herpes is treated with:
 - aciclovir tablets 200mg five times a day for 5 days
- This is best started as soon as possible after the appearance of symptoms and preferably within 72 hours.
- Treatment will shorten and reduce the severity of symptoms.
- **Recurrent episodes** of herpes usually do not need treatment.
- Other helpful tips:
 - Take regular pain killers e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen
 - Bathe or soak in warm salty water – teaspoon to a pint or 3 tablespoons in a bath
 - Apply 5% lidocaine ointment to the sores (available over the counter from some pharmacies)
 - Drink plenty of water
- All treatments from the Wolverton Centre are free and are given to you directly in the clinic.

What about my partner?

- Herpes can be passed onto a partner through sexual contact – this is most likely to occur when you have a sore or break in the skin.
- Sometimes you can pass herpes on to a partner even when there appears to be nothing wrong - this is called 'asymptomatic shedding' – active virus can be shed from normal looking skin intermittently during the year – so you can't tell when it is happening.
- For this reason it is always best to either discuss the problem with your partner or make sure you protect them by using a condom. Condoms can reduce the risk of transmission.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to know whether your partner has herpes or not – particularly if they have never noticed anything wrong. Tests can only be done reliably if they have signs or symptoms. This can be discussed with the doctor.
- Some couples choose to minimise the risk of transmission by avoiding sex or using a condom when they have a recurrence but take a small risk by having unprotected sex the rest of the time.
- If your partner has herpes too and it is the same type (i.e. either type 1 or type 2) then you cannot re-infect them – if it is a different type then you could pass it on.
- There are always choices but it is best to be open and honest with your partner so you can make the best choice for both of you – you can talk through the options with the doctor or nurse.

What problems can herpes lead to?

- Once someone has caught herpes then it will stay in the body indefinitely.
- The herpes viruses have a special property called 'latency' which enables them to become dormant in the sensory nerve cell roots – so for most of the time the infected person has no symptoms.
- Occasionally the virus is reactivated and this will lead to a recurrence of symptoms (e.g. blisters and sores on the skin).
- Some people never experience a recurrence – particularly if they are infected with herpes type 1.
- A few people get frequent recurrences particularly if they have HSV type 2 – but they always reduce in frequency with time.
- Recurrences in some people may be triggered by sunlight (avoid sun beds), trauma (use lube during sex) or by stress or being run down.
- If you have troublesome recurrences then discuss with the doctor at the Wolverton as you may benefit from suppressive treatment with aciclovir for a while.
- For many people the main problem with herpes is the psychological distress it may cause – the doctor or nurse at the Wolverton can help you with this or refer you to our clinical psychologist.
- Herpes increases the risk of catching HIV or passing it on to your partner.

Will herpes come back again after treatment?

- Even if you are treated with aciclovir during your first episode of herpes it may still recur again at some point.
- But for most men the symptoms are so mild that it does not bother them unduly.
- Recurrences become less frequent and much milder with time.
- Troublesome or frequent recurrences (e.g. every 6 to 8 weeks) may be managed with suppressive therapy using aciclovir – discuss this with one of the doctors at the Wolverton.

More information

www.bashh.org

www.hva.org.ukwww.herpessalliance.org

Opening times for advice and to book an appointment:

Monday, Tuesday & Thursday	8.30am - 6.00pm
Wednesday	8.30am - 8.00pm
Friday	8.30am - 1.30pm

[For clinic times please select here](#)NHS Trust 2010 | [Terms and Conditions of use](#) | [Site by Phew](#)